UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.341
27 March 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Seventeenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 341st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 10 July 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHAN

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Antigua and Barbuda (CEDAW/C/ANT/1-3) and supplement to the initial, second and third periodic reports (continued)

Article 7

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Roseau (Antigua and Barbuda) took a place at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON said that, given the large number of women appointed to high political office in the State party, it was surprising that women had never been elected to the legislature. She wished to know whether women had ever been nominated for legislative positions, and whether non-governmental organizations or political parties had pressed for such nominations. She also inquired whether the Government had sought to establish a quota for women in decision-making and political posts, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention.

Article 10

3. Ms. BERNARD requested further information concerning the high school drop-out rate for girls. She wondered whether the increasing problem of teenage pregnancies in the Caribbean was one reason for that high rate and if so, how prevalent the problem was and what was being done to reverse the trend. She also asked whether there were further reasons.

4. Ms. HARTONO said that she would welcome details concerning the curriculum of the University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies and wished to know whether its graduates had moved on to decision-making posts in politics or government and to managerial posts in private companies. She wondered whether, in reality, a double standard was applied to the education of boys and girls or whether parents did in fact bring up their children to believe that boys, too, should perform household chores. Lastly, she asked what image of women was being portrayed on television, and whether negative stereotypes were being perpetuated.

5. Ms. FERRER wished to know whether adult literacy programmes existed and whether women had opportunities for continuing education. She would welcome details concerning the enrolment of girls at the pre-primary school level and inquired whether efforts were being made to counter cultural traditions which discouraged families from sending girls to school. With regard to higher education, she wished to know whether vocational training was available to women to prepare them for careers normally entered by men. She also requested further information regarding courses in the tourist industry and the extent to which girls could choose their careers.

6. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS observed that women tended to be clustered in lower-level jobs. She wondered whether, at the secondary school and university levels, any programmes existed to enable women to broaden their expectations in life, for example, through women's studies and gender studies programmes. She wished to know what specific steps were being taken to develop positive attitudes among boys and girls with regard to equality between the sexes.

7. Ms. Yung Chung KIM said that she would appreciate sex-disaggregated figures for the literacy rate of 88.7 per cent. She wished to know whether there were more girls than boys among the students who remained in school up to the age of 20. It was encouraging that women accounted for a very high percentage of students enrolled at the college level. However, many of those women selected subjects traditionally deemed suitable for women. From the earliest levels of education, females should receive systematic guidance to counter the traditional stereotypes of men's and women's roles, a step which her own country was taking.

8. The CHAIRPERSON inquired whether compulsory education for children ages 5 to 16 was totally free and wished to know the percentage of girls and boys attending primary and secondary schools.

Article 11

9. Ms. FERRER asked whether women were eligible for retirement benefits and if so, at what age, and whether women truly received equal pay for work equal to that performed by men. She also inquired whether the State party had ratified ILO Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value. Lastly, she wished to know whether the Directorate of Women's Affairs planned to offer training sessions to provide women with skills that would enable them to enjoy access to jobs offering higher pay and increased respect and responsibility.

10. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS asked what was being done to enable women in the hotel industry to diversify their skills so that they could occupy higher positions in that industry. She welcomed the fact that child care services were available to employed as well as unemployed mothers and wished to know the extent to which such facilities were subsidized by the State and whether the subsidies formed a component of a permanent programme. Lastly, she would appreciate receiving a more complete picture of how women participated in labour unions.

Article 12

11. Ms. ABAKA suggested that the Government should add AIDS to the list of chronic diseases for which subsidized medical care was provided. She noted that early detection of sickle-cell anaemia could greatly facilitate treatment, and she offered to share her country's experience in that regard. She drew the State party's attention to the fact that the Committee's general recommendations 12 and 19 concerning violence against women applied to article 12. The Committee should be informed of the impact of violence on the health of women, including their mental health. Since article 12 also related to the role of women as health care providers, the Committee should be informed of the number of female doctors, pharmacists, nurses and other major health professionals. Information also should be provided on the incidence of work accidents and

work-related diseases among women and on the health needs of migrant women. She also requested information on programmes to prevent and combat drug addiction.

12. She had been very pleased to learn from other sources that the fertility rate in Antigua and Barbuda had declined. Such a decline had multiple positive effects on society. As infant mortality declined, females stayed in school longer, their overall status improved and they did not become dependent on their children in their later years. She was keenly aware of the negative effect on women of an overemphasis on childbearing, and she wished to know what the State party had done to bring about the decline in its national fertility rate.

13. Ms. SHALEV said that the analysis provided in the oral presentation by the representative of the State party made it easier to understand the health status of women in that country. In order to clarify the relation between the medical benefits scheme and the health care services providing maternal and child care facilities, the State party should indicate whether the scheme and services were separate or integrated, and whether one was public and one was private. It was important for any health-care scheme covering routine benefits to include the cost of contraceptives, and failure to do so constituted discrimination against women. She wished to know whether contraceptive services were included in the State party's medical benefits scheme. The information provided indicated that, although abortions were not legal, they were often performed in doctors' offices. She urged the Government to review its position on abortion with a view to removing any penal provisions which made it a crime for women to control their own fertility and for medical providers to assist them.

14. The representative of the State party had noted that perinatal mortality rates were relatively high, notwithstanding the numerous services available to pregnant women and the high quality of midwifery services. Such tragedies were not unusual where abortion was unsafe or illegal, a fact which underscored how important it was for the Government to review its abortion laws. As to the maternal mortality rates reported in document CEDAW/C/ANT/1-3, she wished to know why the rate in 1991 had been so much higher than in the other years for which the rate had been indicated.

15. The additional information supplied concerning HIV/AIDS suggested that women were increasingly at risk for AIDS, and she asked what was being done to address that problem. It would be interesting to learn the response of the Health Department to violence against women. It was very important to train health care professionals to identify cases of domestic violence and care for victims of such violence. She also wondered whether victims of violence were covered by the medical benefits scheme. Lastly, she inquired whether any programmes were in place for the early detection and treatment of breast and uterine cancer.

Article 14

16. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that rural women, especially those in developing countries, were victims both of the structural discrimination that existed in the society at large and of the difficult conditions in the rural environment in which they lived. The school drop-out and fertility rates for such women were usually high, and deep-seated cultural stereotypes were additional obstacles to

their advancement. She therefore wondered whether the Government of Antigua and Barbuda was considering any media and information programmes targeted at rural women and young girls and aimed at overcoming some of the disadvantages which she had just described.

17. Ms. CORTI noted that, although 53 per cent of all full-time farmers in Antigua were women, the average size of female-owned farms was less than one acre compared to an average of 2.5 acres for male-owned farms. It would be interesting to know the reasons for that discrepancy. In keeping with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Directorate of Women's Affairs must make every effort to improve the conditions under which rural women in Antigua and Barbuda lived. She wondered, for example, whether district health clinics in rural communities provided medical attention only in cases of emergency. She would also welcome more detailed information on the nature of the family planning services provided in rural areas.

18. The CHAIRPERSON noted that women farmers in Antigua and Barbuda comprised a significant proportion of the agricultural population, but that the efficiency of their farms was hampered by their small size and the lack of access to loans for capital development and farm equipment. She drew attention to the Grameen Bank in her own country of Bangladesh, which provided small unsecured loans to rural women, and she wondered whether any similar loan schemes existed in Antigua and Barbuda. If not, it would be interesting to know what percentage of women farmers was able to obtain secured loans through the traditional banking system.

Article 16

19. Ms. HARTONO asked whether females had the same rights of inheritance as males and whether women could become legal guardians of their own children. She would also welcome information on the divorce rate and on the enforcement of court decisions awarding alimony.

20. Ms. BERNARD wished to know what legislation was in force to protect women in common-law marriages, especially when such relationships ended. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) had drafted model legislation in that field, and she wondered whether Antigua and Barbuda had any plans to incorporate that legislation into its domestic law.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.